Thousands celebrate Atlanta Black Gay Pride weekend

By Craig Washington
Special to The Atlanta Voice

Thousands of black lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered people flocked to the "city too busy to hate" this past Labor Day weekend to celebrate Atlanta Black Gay Pride.

Proclaimed as the official organizers of Atlanta Black Gay Pride by former Mayor Bill Campbell, In The Life Atlanta has convened this annual event since 1996. The Sheraton Colony Square Hotel in Midtown served as this year's official host and was filled to capacity.

T he weekend's festivities were capped by the third annual Stand Up and Represent March on Labor Day morning in the historic West End district. ITLA Board Co-Chair Michael Slaughter attributed this year's success to "a major shift in the quality and scale of the event. We had more volunteers that were willing to give extra time to plan and coordinate. There was also an increase in the number of corporate sponsors including Delta and IBM."

Black Gay Pride March: Unity Fellowship Church Atlanta members are ready to "Stand Up and Represent"

Other sponsors included Venus Magazine, Classic Soul 102.5, Rolling Out, Georgia Equality, Outwrite Bookstore, Southern Voice, AID Atlanta, Human Rights Campaign, The Atlanta Voice and Out and Advocate Magazine.

The weekend commenced with the Candlelight Vigil held at the Studioplex on Auburn Avenue. As the traditional opening event, the vigil commemorates those who lost their lives to HIV/AIDS, breast cancer, violence, and other physical and emotional health challenges. Scores of attendants gathered to hear spoken word and song and prayer as they honored the departed who have touched their lives.

"So much of the weekend is about a party," said ITLA Picnic coordinator Lynn Duhart. "Its important for us to remember that the AIDS epidemic is still a problem not only among gays but the whole African American community."

State Senator Vincent Fort, an outspoken ally of gays throughout Georgia, challenged attendees at the opening ceremony to become more involved and visible.

"You have a place inside and outside the gates to be an engine for change," he said

Atlanta Executive Network (AEN) joined ITLA to present a community discussion on Saturday, August 30. Among the panelists were keynote speaker Trevor Pettiford, a WAGA Fox 5 reporter, Monique Durham - IBM Education Client Representative, former AEN Board President Ronald Moore, Venus Magazine Editor Charlene Cothran, Cindy Abel - bizvox Marketing Communications CEO & President, Allen Thornell - Georgia Equality Executive Director, Jerry Gonzales - Georgia Hispanic Network, President, Robin G. White - Kings Crossing Publishing Co.

Several workshops were offered throughout the rest of the afternoon that addressed an impressive range of topics including "Acceptance and Preparation for Aging," "God Loves Me But Do I love Myself" and "Lesbians and Domestic Violence". But Saturday night, the kings ruled. The show entitled "A Feast Of Kings: Girls Do Boys" showcased females impersonating male crooners and characters.

The third annual Stand Up and Represent march was the most visible and political element of the Black Gay Pride weekend. Founder Anthony McWilliams first conceived of the march in a dream he had three years ago. Early Labor Day afternoon, over 200 participants marched throughout the West End streets chanting "We're Black, We're Out We're Proud" as onlookers witnessed from their cars, storefronts and porches.

"I've been coming here since before the march and it just keeps getting bigger and bigger," City Council President Cathy Woolard observed. The march commenced at the Mall West Endl parking lot and culminated at West End Park.

Among prominent leaders who marched were State Senator Vincent Fort, Woolard, Commissioner Nancy Boxill, and City Councilperson H. Lamar Willis. When asked why he joined the march, Willis reflected, "I grew up in this city. Many of the individuals that helped my single mother raise me were those who identified with this lifestyle. Its important that we understand that in the African American community, we come in all different hues and sexual orientations and be able to embrace that."

Powerful women of the community: (l to r) Aida Rentis, Gayle Booker (Unity Fellowship Church) Charlene Cothran (Publisher of Venus Magazine) and Sharon Hodnet (Co-Chair of In The Life Atlanta).

"I Buy Houses" & Sell Non-Qualifying Houses.
I will make your house payments.
No Banks
Call Corey
(404) 557-2264

NEW!
Talk all you want, anytime you want, to anywhere in the country.
$40 a month.* Unlimited local calling and unlimited long distance.
No limits. No contracts. No catches.
metroPCS.
metropcs.com Permission to speak freely.® 888.8metro8
Downtown 105 Peachtree Street NW, Suite 104 (in the Equitable Building) 404.523.3320
Southlake 6457 Tara Boulevard (Office Depot Shopping Center) 770.603.2211
Sandy Springs 5041 Roswell Road (1 Block North of I-285 next to Three Dollar Café) 404.255.6071
Marietta/Vinings 1871 Cobb Pkwy, Ste 200 (1 Block North of Windy Hill Road) 770.859.9440
Gwinnett 2180 Pleasant Hill Road, Suite B12 (Kroger Shopping Center) 770.814.2907
South DeKalb 2901 Candler Road, Suite 1 (Mall Parking Lot) 404.241.3033
Buckhead 3330 Piedmont Road, Suite 23b (Kroger Shopping Center) 404.816.6646
Town Center 741 Town Park Lane, Ste 107 (Located on Chastain Road between I-75 and I-575) 770.499.2254
NorthWake 4030 La Vista Road (Across from NorthWake Mall next to Michael's) 678.937.1980
Roswell 10664 Alpharetta Hwy, Ste 100, (1 Block North of Holcomb Bridge Road) 770.998.2750
Also available at over 150 Authorized dealer locations all over Metro Atlanta. To find a store near you, visit metropcs.com or call 888.8metro8 or visit us online at www.metropcs.com.
For your business sales, call 770.256.3051